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(54) **ILLUMINATING BADGE FOR A VEHICLE**

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G09F 21/04 (2006.01)
B60Q 1/50 (2006.01)
G09F 13/22 (2006.01)

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See application file for complete search history.

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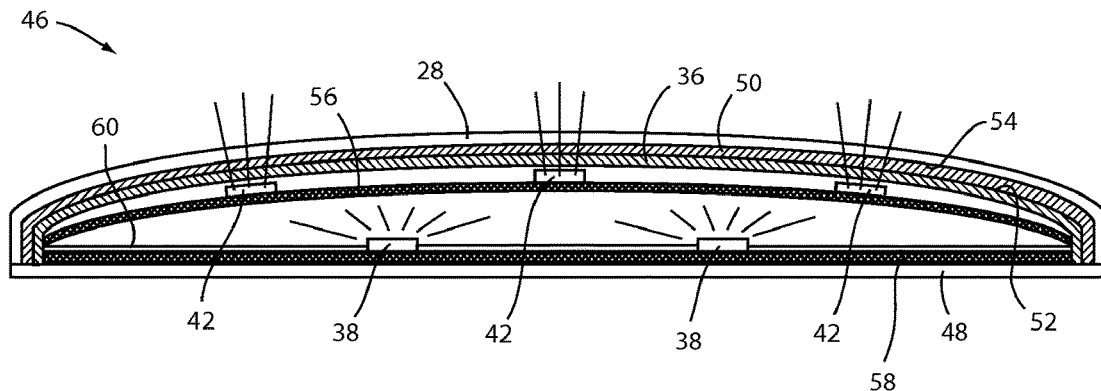
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A badge mounted on a vehicle is provided herein. The badge includes a housing having a viewable portion. A first and a second light source are disposed inside the housing and are each configured to direct light toward the viewable portion. The viewable portion is configured to luminesce in response to excitation by light emitted from the first light source. Light emitted from the second light source produces a sparkle on the viewable portion.

17 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets



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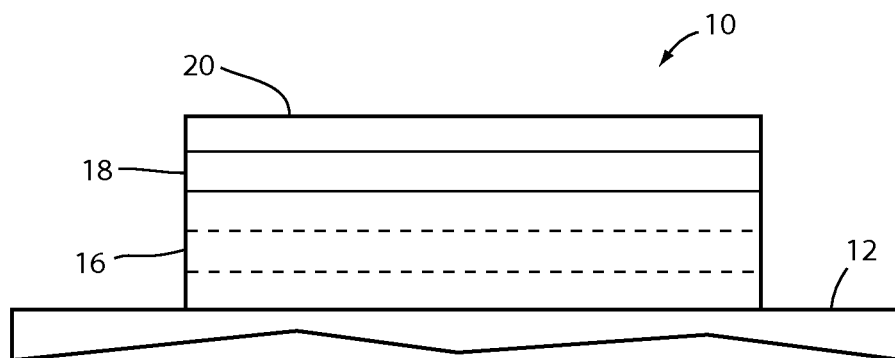


FIG. 1A

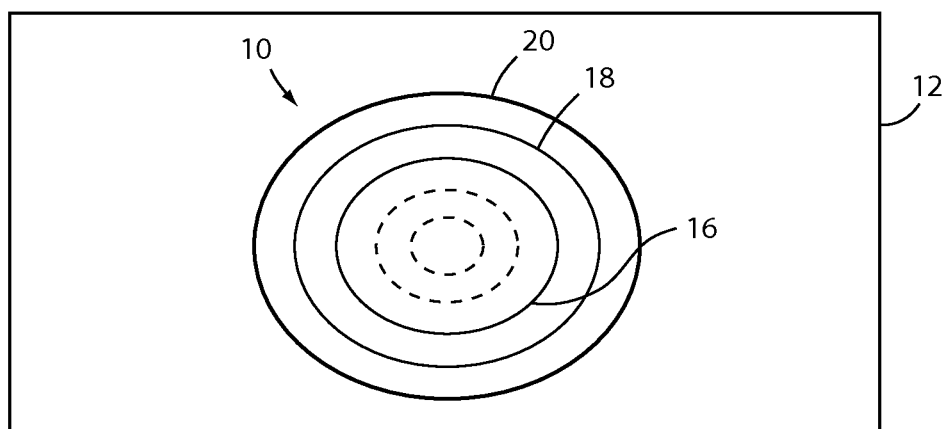


FIG. 1B

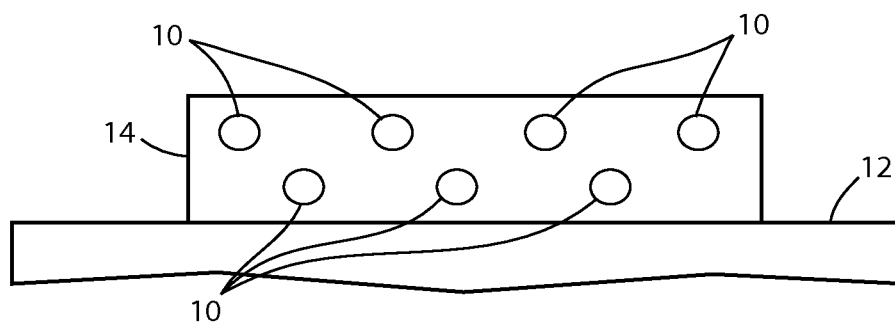


FIG. 1C

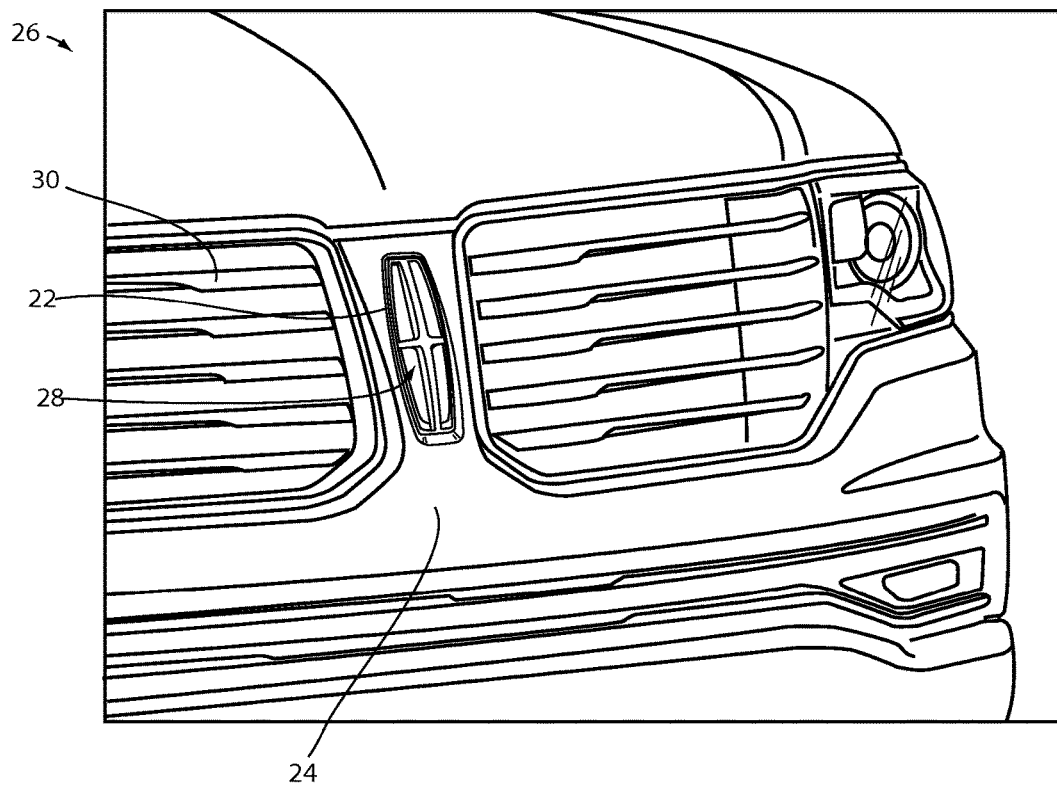


FIG. 2

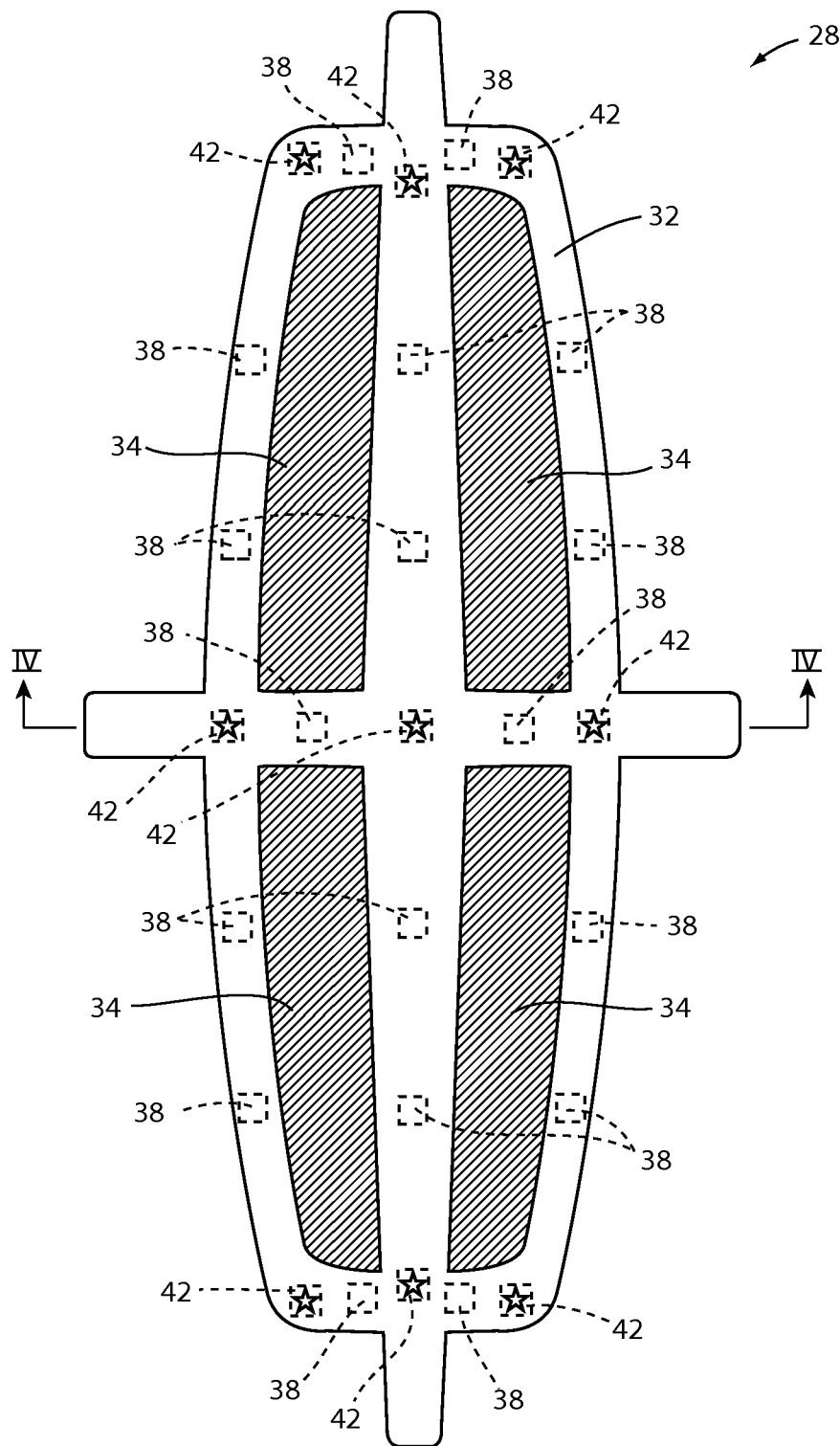


FIG. 3

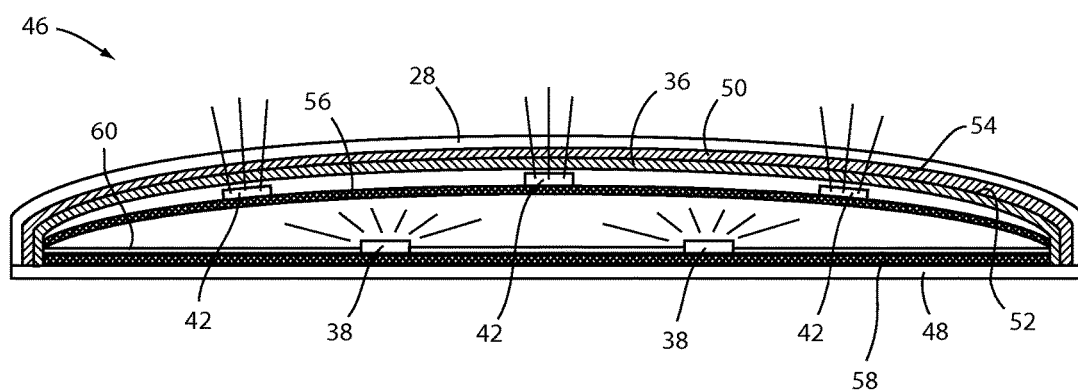


FIG. 4

1

ILLUMINATING BADGE FOR A VEHICLE**CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION**

This application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 14/086,442, filed Nov. 21, 2013, and entitled "VEHICLE LIGHTING SYSTEM WITH PHOTOLUMINESCENT STRUCTURE," the entire disclosure of which is hereby incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present disclosure generally relates to vehicle lighting systems, and more particularly, to vehicle lighting systems employing one or more photoluminescent structures.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Illumination arising from the use of photoluminescent structures offers a unique and attractive viewing experience. It is therefore desired to implement such structures in automotive vehicles for various lighting applications.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to one aspect of the present invention, a badge mounted on a vehicle is provided. The badge includes a housing having a viewable portion. A first and a second light source are disposed inside the housing and are each configured to direct light toward the viewable portion. The viewable portion is configured to luminesce in response to excitation by light emitted from the first light source. Light emitted from the second light source produces a sparkle on the viewable portion.

According to another aspect of the present invention, a badge for a vehicle is provided. The badge includes a viewable portion and a first light source configured to emit light toward the viewable portion. A second light source is configured to pulse light toward the viewable portion. The viewable portion is configured to luminesce in response to excitation by light emitted from the first light source. Pulsed light emitted from the second light source produces a sparkle on the viewable portion.

According to another aspect of the present invention, a badge is provided. The badge includes a housing having a viewable portion. A first and a second light source are disposed inside the housing and are each configured to direct light toward the viewable portion. Portions of the viewable portion are configured to glow in a first color and sparkle in a second color that is visually distinct from the first color.

These and other aspects, objects, and features of the present invention will be understood and appreciated by those skilled in the art upon studying the following specification, claims, and appended drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In the drawings:

FIG. 1A illustrates a photoluminescent structure coupled to a substrate, according to one embodiment;

FIG. 1B illustrates a photoluminescent structure coupled to a substrate, according to another embodiment;

FIG. 1C illustrates a photoluminescent structure coupled to a substrate, according to yet another embodiment;

FIG. 2 illustrates a badge mounted to a front portion of a vehicle;

2

FIG. 3 is a front view of the badge according to one embodiment; and

FIG. 4 is a cross-sectional view of the badge taken along lines IV-IV of FIG. 3.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

As required, detailed embodiments of the present invention are disclosed herein. However, it is to be understood that the disclosed embodiments are merely exemplary of the invention that may be embodied in various and alternative forms. The figures are not necessarily to a detailed design and some schematics may be exaggerated or minimized to show function overview. Therefore, specific structural and functional details disclosed herein are not to be interpreted as limiting, but merely as a representative basis for teaching one skilled in the art to variously employ the present invention.

As used herein, the term "and/or," when used in a list of two or more items, means that any one of the listed items can be employed by itself, or any combination of two or more of the listed items can be employed. For example, if a composition is described as containing components A, B, and/or C, the composition can contain A alone; B alone; C alone; A and B in combination; A and C in combination; B and C in combination; or A, B, and C in combination.

The following disclosure describes an illuminating badge for a vehicle. The badge may advantageously employ one or more photoluminescent structures configured to convert light received from an associated light source and re-emit the light at a different wavelength typically found in the visible spectrum.

Referring to FIGS. 1A-1C, various exemplary embodiments of a photoluminescent structure **10** are shown, each capable of being coupled to a substrate **12**, which may correspond to a vehicle fixture or vehicle related piece of equipment. In FIG. 1A, the photoluminescent structure **10** is generally shown rendered as a coating (e.g. a film) that may be applied to a surface of the substrate **12**. In FIG. 1B, the photoluminescent structure **10** is generally shown as a discrete particle capable of being integrated with a substrate **12**. In FIG. 1C, the photoluminescent structure **10** is generally shown as a plurality of discrete particles that may be incorporated into a support medium **14** (e.g. a film) that may then be applied (as shown) or integrated with the substrate **12**.

At the most basic level, a given photoluminescent structure **10** includes an energy conversion layer **16** that may include one or more sub layers, which are exemplarily shown through broken lines in FIGS. 1A and 1B. Each sub layer of the energy conversion layer **16** may include one or more photoluminescent materials having energy converting elements with phosphorescent or fluorescent properties. Each photoluminescent material may become excited upon receiving light of a specific wavelength, thereby causing the light to undergo a conversion process. Under the principle of down conversion, the inputted light is converted into a longer wavelength light that is outputted from the photoluminescent structure **10**. Conversely, under the principle of up conversion, the inputted light is converted into a shorter wavelength light that is outputted from the photoluminescent structure **10**. When multiple distinct wavelengths of light are outputted from the photoluminescent structure **10** at the same time, the wavelengths of light may mix together and be expressed as a multicolor light.

In some embodiments, light that has been down converted or up converted may be used to excite other photoluminescent material(s) found in the energy conversion layer 16. The process of using converted light outputted from one photoluminescent material to excite another, and so on, is generally known as an energy cascade and may serve as an alternative for achieving various color expressions. With respect to either conversion principle, the difference in wavelength between the exciting light and the converted light is known as the Stokes shift and serves as the principle driving mechanism for an energy conversion process corresponding to a change in wavelength of light. In the various implementations discussed herein, each of the photoluminescent structures may operate under either conversion principle.

The energy conversion layer 16 may be prepared by dispersing the photoluminescent material in a polymer matrix to form a homogenous mixture using a variety of methods. Such methods may include preparing the energy conversion layer 16 from a formulation in a liquid carrier medium and coating the energy conversion layer 16 to a desired substrate. The energy conversion layer 16 may be applied to a substrate by painting, screen printing, spraying, slot coating, dip coating, roller coating, and bar coating. Alternatively, the energy conversion layer 16 may be prepared by methods that do not use a liquid carrier medium. For example, the energy conversion layer 16 may be rendered by dispersing the photoluminescent material into a solid state solution (homogenous mixture in a dry state) that may be incorporated in a polymer matrix, which may be formed by extrusion, injection molding, compression molding, calendaring, thermoforming, etc. The energy conversion layer 16 may then be integrated into a substrate using any methods known to those skilled in the art. When the energy conversion layer 16 includes sub layers, each sub layer may be sequentially coated to form the energy conversion layer 16. Alternatively, the sub layers can be separately prepared and later laminated or embossed together to form the energy conversion layer 16. Alternatively still, the energy conversion layer 16 may be formed by coextruding the sub layers.

Referring back to FIGS. 1A and 1B, the photoluminescent structure 10 may optionally include at least one stability layer 18 to protect the photoluminescent material contained within the energy conversion layer 16 from photolytic and thermal degradation. The stability layer 18 may be configured as a separate layer optically coupled and adhered to the energy conversion layer 16. Alternatively, the stability layer 18 may be integrated with the energy conversion layer 16. The photoluminescent structure 10 may also optionally include a protection layer 20 optically coupled and adhered to the stability layer 18 or other layer (e.g. the conversion layer 16 in the absence of the stability layer 18) to protect the photoluminescent structure 10 from physical and chemical damage arising from environmental exposure. The stability layer 18 and/or the protective layer 20 may be combined with the energy conversion layer 16 through sequential coating or printing of each layer, sequential lamination or embossing, or any other suitable means.

Additional information regarding the construction of photoluminescent structures is disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 8,232,533 to Kingsley et al., entitled "PHOTOLYTICALLY AND ENVIRONMENTALLY STABLE MULTILAYER STRUCTURE FOR HIGH EFFICIENCY ELECTROMAGNETIC ENERGY CONVERSION AND SUSTAINED SECONDARY EMISSION," filed Jul. 31, 2012, the entire disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference. For additional information regarding fabrication and utilization of photolu-

minescent materials to achieve various light emissions, refer to U.S. Pat. No. 8,207,511 to Bortz et al., entitled "PHOTOLUMINESCENT FIBERS, COMPOSITIONS AND FABRICS MADE THEREFROM," filed Jun. 26, 2012; U.S. Pat. No. 8,247,761 to Agrawal et al., entitled "PHOTOLUMINESCENT MARKINGS WITH FUNCTIONAL OVERLAYERS," filed Aug. 21, 2012; U.S. Pat. No. 8,519,359 B2 to Kingsley et al., entitled "PHOTOLYTICALLY AND ENVIRONMENTALLY STABLE MULTILAYER STRUCTURE FOR HIGH EFFICIENCY ELECTROMAGNETIC ENERGY CONVERSION AND SUSTAINED SECONDARY EMISSION," filed Aug. 27, 2013; U.S. Pat. No. 8,664,624 B2 to Kingsley et al., entitled "ILLUMINATION DELIVERY SYSTEM FOR GENERATING SUSTAINED SECONDARY EMISSION," filed Mar. 4, 2014; U.S. Patent Publication No. 2012/0183677 to Agrawal et al., entitled "PHOTOLUMINESCENT COMPOSITIONS, METHODS OF MANUFACTURE AND NOVEL USES," filed Jul. 19, 2012; U.S. Patent Publication No. 2014/0065442 A1 to Kingsley et al., entitled "PHOTOLUMINESCENT OBJECTS," filed Mar. 6, 2014; and U.S. Patent Publication No. 2014/0103258 A1 to Agrawal et al., entitled "CHROMIC LUMINESCENT COMPOSITIONS AND TEXTILES," filed Apr. 17, 2014, all of which are included herein by reference in their entirety.

Referring to FIG. 2, a badge 22 is generally shown mounted on a front end 24 of a vehicle 26. In other embodiments, the badge 22 may be located elsewhere, such as, but not limited to, the rear end or side(s) of the vehicle 26. The badge 22 may be configured as an insignia that is presented as an identifying mark of a vehicle manufacturer and includes a viewable portion 28 that is generally prominently displayed on the vehicle 26. In the presently illustrated embodiment, the badge 22 is disposed proximate a grille assembly 30 in a central location of the front end 24, thus allowing the badge 22 to be readily viewed by an observer looking head on at the vehicle 26. As will be described below in greater detail, the badge 22 may illuminate and sparkle (i.e., shine brightly with flashes of light) to provide a distinct styling element to the vehicle 26.

Referring to FIG. 3, the viewable portion 28 of the badge 22 is exemplarily shown according to one embodiment. The viewable portion 28 may include light permeable portion 32 and light non-permeable portions 34, which may be configured as opaque coatings applied to the viewable portion 28. In alternative embodiments, portions 34 may be left open to the front end 24 of the vehicle 26. The viewable portion 28 may also include a photoluminescent structure 36 (see FIG. 4) coupled to the underside of the viewable portion 28 and configured to luminesce in response to excitation by light emitted from one or more light sources 38 disposed inside the badge 22 and positioned below the photoluminescent structure 36. The light sources 38 may be configured as light emitting diodes (LEDs) emitting a wavelength of light that is characterized as ultraviolet light (~10-400 nanometers in wavelength), violet light (~380-450 nanometers in wavelength), or blue light (~450-495 nanometers in wavelength) to take advantage of the relative low cost attributable to those types of LEDs.

According to one embodiment, light emitted from light sources 38 is converted by the photoluminescent structure 36 into light of a longer wavelength and outputted therefrom. The converted light corresponds to a visible light, which includes the portion of the electromagnetic spectrum that can be detected by the human eye (~390-700 nanometers in wavelength) and may be expressed in a variety of colors defined by a single wavelength (e.g., red, green, blue)

5

or a mixture of multiple wavelengths (e.g., white). Thus, it should be understood that the photoluminescent structure 36 may be configured such that converted light outputted therefrom is capable of being expressed as unicolored or multicolored light. According to one embodiment, light sources 38 are configured to emit blue light and the photoluminescent structure 36 is configured to convert the blue light into a neutral white light having a color temperature of approximately 4000K to 5000K. The converted light escapes from the badge 22 via portion 32, thereby causing portion 32 to glow. To obtain a uniform illumination of portion 32, light sources 38 may be configured to emit non-focused light and are spaced accordingly inside the badge 22 to provide an even distribution of light for exciting the photoluminescent structure 36.

In addition to illuminating, portion 32 may be configured to sparkle at one or more locations, as is graphically illustrated in FIG. 3 by stars. The locations may be chosen to correspond to a corner or edge of portion 32. The sparkle effect at each location may be produced by light emitted from a corresponding light source 42 that is disposed inside the badge 22 and positioned below the photoluminescent structure 36 in relative proximity to the sparkle location. Each light source 42 may be operated to pulse light onto the corresponding sparkle location. According to one implementation, a pulse of light from a given light source 42 may last approximately $\frac{1}{10}$ to $\frac{1}{100}$ of a second and light sources 42 may be pulsed randomly or in a pattern. Additionally, a variable current may be supplied to each light source 42 to adjust the degree of illumination for each sparkle. For example the current may vary from 1 to 5 times the steady state current.

Light sources 42 may be configured as LEDs emitting a wavelength of light that does not excite the photoluminescent structure 36 and is instead transmitted through the photoluminescent structure 36 to directly illuminate the corresponding sparkle locations on portion 32. Alternatively, portions of the photoluminescent structure 36 located above light sources 42 may be cut out to allow light emitted from light sources 42 to directly illuminate the corresponding sparkle locations without having to pass through the photoluminescent structure 36. Light sources 42 may be chosen such that light emitted therefrom is relatively brighter than the luminescence exhibited by the photoluminescent structure 36 to allow the sparkles to be more apparent to onlookers. For instance, where the photoluminescent structure 36 luminesces in a neutral white color as in the embodiment described above, light sources 38 may be configured to emit cool white light having a color temperature of approximately 6000K to 6500K.

Referring to FIG. 4, a cross-sectional view of the badge 22 is shown according to one embodiment. The badge 22 includes a housing 46 having the viewable portion 28 described above and a rear portion 48 that is capable of being secured to a vehicle. The viewable portion 28 may be arcuate whereas the rear portion 48 may be substantially linear. Each portion 28, 48 may be constructed from a rigid material such as, but not limited to, plastic and may be assembled together via sonic or laser welding. Alternatively, portions 28 and 48 may be assembled together via low-pressure insert molding.

With respect to the illustrated embodiment, the viewable portion 28 may be metalized to give the badge 22 a metallic outer appearance. For example, a metallic layer 50 may be applied to the underside of the viewable portion 28 via partial vacuum deposition. The metallic layer 50 should be light permeable to allow light to pass there through from an

6

inner side 52 to an outer side 54. According to one embodiment, the photoluminescent structure 36 covers the metallic layer 50 and may be applied over the metallic layer 50 as a paint or other coating. In an alternative embodiment, the photoluminescent structure 42 may be molded or otherwise integrated into the viewable portion 28 of the housing 46.

Referring still to FIG. 4, light sources 42 may be provided on a flexible printed circuit board (PCB) 56 that is secured inside the housing 46 and positioned proximate to the viewable portion 28. Light sources 42 may each be positioned directly below the corresponding sparkle locations and pulse light toward the corresponding sparkle locations to produce brilliant flashes of light. Optionally, light sources 42 may include focusing optics to help concentrate light onto the corresponding sparkle locations. With respect to the illustrated embodiment, the PCB 56 should be substantially light permeable to allow light emitted from light sources 42 to be transmitted there through to excite the photoluminescent structure 36. As shown, light sources 38 may be positioned relatively further away from the viewable portion 28 to allow for a greater distribution of light toward the photoluminescent structure 36. For example, light sources 28 may be provided on a PCB 58 that is secured to the rear portion 48. The PCB 58 may include a white solder mask 60 to reflect light incident thereon.

According to one embodiment, the photoluminescent structure 36 is substantially Lambertian, that is, the apparent brightness of the photoluminescent structure 36 is substantially constant regardless of an observer's angle of view. As a consequence, converted light may be emitted outwardly from the photoluminescent structure 36 in numerous directions. With respect to the embodiment shown in FIG. 4, a portion of the converted light may be transmitted through the metallic layer 50 and outputted from portion 32 of the viewable portion 28. Another portion of the converted light may be emitted into the interior of the housing 46 and become incident on the white solder mask of the PCB 58. As a result, the converted light may be redirected back toward the photoluminescent structure 36 and transmitted there through before finally being outputted from the housing 46 via portion 32 of the viewable portion 28. This helps to ensure that the viewable portion 28 exhibits an optimal amount of luminescence. Furthermore, the provision of the white solder mask on PCB 58 also helps to ensure that an optimal amount of light emitted from light sources 42 reaches the photoluminescent structure 36. For example, it is possible for a portion of the light emitted from one or more of the light sources 42 to reflect off the photoluminescent structure 36, thereby resulting in decreased excitation of the photoluminescent structure 36. Thus, by providing a means to redirect the light back toward the photoluminescent structure 36, wayward propagating light originating from light sources 42 and contained inside the housing 46 is given another opportunity to excite the photoluminescent structure 36.

Accordingly an illuminating badge for a vehicle has been advantageously described herein. The badge provides various benefits including an efficient and cost-effective means to produce illumination that may function as a distinct styling element that increases the refinement of a vehicle.

For the purposes of describing and defining the present teachings, it is noted that the terms "substantially" and "approximately" are utilized herein to represent the inherent degree of uncertainty that may be attributed to any quantitative comparison, value, measurement, or other representation. The term "substantially" and "approximately" are also utilized herein to represent the degree by which a

quantitative representation may vary from a stated reference without resulting in a change in the basic function of the subject matter at issue.

It is to be understood that variations and modifications can be made on the aforementioned structure without departing from the concepts of the present invention, and further it is to be understood that such concepts are intended to be covered by the following claims unless these claims by their language expressly state otherwise.

What is claimed is:

1. A badge for a vehicle, comprising:
a housing of the badge having a viewable portion; and
a first and second light source disposed inside the housing
and each configured to direct light toward the viewable
portion;
wherein the viewable portion is configured to luminesce
in response to excitation by light emitted from the first
light source; and
wherein the second light source is disposed at a position
in between the first light source and the viewable
portion and is configured to pulse light in order to
produce a sparkle at various locations on the viewable
portion.
2. The badge of claim 1, wherein the second light source
is disposed proximate at least one of an outer edge and a
corner of the viewable portion.
3. The badge of claim 1, wherein the viewable portion
includes a photoluminescent structure configured to perform
an energy conversion on light emitted from the first light
source.
4. The badge of claim 1, wherein the first light source is
one of an ultraviolet LED, a violet LED, and a blue LED,
and the second light source is a cool white LED.
5. The badge of claim 4, wherein the viewable portion
luminesces in a neutral white color.
6. A badge for a vehicle, comprising:
a viewable portion of the badge;
a first light source configured to emit light toward the
viewable portion; and
a second light source configured to pulse light toward the
viewable portion;
wherein the viewable portion is configured to luminesce
in response to excitation by light emitted from the first
light source; and

wherein pulsed light emitted from the second light source
produces a sparkle on the viewable portion, and
wherein the second light source is more proximately
located to the viewable portion than the first light
source.

7. The badge of claim 6, wherein the second light source
is disposed proximate at least one of an outer edge and a
corner of the viewable portion.

8. The badge of claim 6, wherein the viewable portion
includes a photoluminescent structure configured to perform
an energy conversion on light emitted from the first light
source.

9. The badge of claim 6, wherein the first light source is
one of an ultraviolet LED, a violet LED, and a blue LED,
and the second light source is a cool white LED.

10. The badge of claim 9, wherein the viewable portion
luminesces in a neutral white color.

11. The badge of claim 6, wherein each pulse of light from
the second light source lasts $\frac{1}{10}$ to $\frac{1}{100}$ of a second.

12. A vehicle badge comprising:
a vehicle badge housing having a viewable portion; and
a first and second light source disposed inside the housing
and configured to direct light toward the viewable
portion, the second light source more proximately
located to the viewable portion than the first light
source; and

wherein portions of the viewable portion are configured to
luminesce in a first color and sparkle in a second color
visually distinct from the first color.

13. The badge of claim 12, wherein the second light
source is disposed proximate at least one of an outer edge
and a corner of the viewable portion.

14. The badge of claim 12, wherein the viewable portion
includes a photoluminescent structure configured to perform
an energy conversion on light emitted from the first light
source.

15. The badge of claim 12, wherein the first light source
is one of an ultraviolet LED, a violet LED, and a blue LED,
and the second light source is a cool white LED.

16. The badge of claim 15, wherein the viewable portion
luminesces in a neutral white color.

17. The badge of claim 12, wherein each pulse of light
from the second light source lasts $\frac{1}{10}$ to $\frac{1}{100}$ of a second.

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